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# Stylizations of Being: Attention as an Existential Hub in Heidegger and Christian Mysticism

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**Abstract:** The assimilation of phenomenology by theology (namely of Heidegger by Karl Rahner) exemplifies how a pre-existing philosophical framework can be imported into a theological system by being suffused with belief. Although one would imagine that the incommensurability between philosophy and religion would thus be overcome, the two disciplines risk to remain, given the sequels of the ‘French debate’, worlds apart, separated by a leap of faith. In this paper I attempt to uncover what grammatical similitudes afforded Rahner formal transference in the first place. Uncovering analogous uses of contemplative attention, namely between Heidegger and Simone Weil, I hope to demonstrate the filial relationship between existential phenomenology and Christian mysticism. I propose that attention is a key factor in both systems of thought. Furthermore, I propose that: 1) attention, the existential hub between subject and phenomena, provides a base for investigating *methodologies*, as opposed to causal relations, in philosophy and religion; 2) that the two attentional disciplines of meditation and contemplation, spiritual practices designed to shape the self, also constitute styles of thinking; and 3) the ‘turn’ in the later Heidegger’s philosophy is a strategic point to inquire into this confluence of styles of thinking, evincing the constantly dynamic and intrinsically tight relation between philosophy and theology.

**Keywords:** Contemplation, meditation, existential phenomenology, Simone Weil, Jean-Luc Nancy, Stoicism, Jean-Luc Marion, Husserl, Karl Rahner.

## Introduction. Rahner and Heidegger: Formal Translatability of ‘Being’

In *Karl Rahner*, Thomas Sheehan claims that Rahner is using Heidegger’s “existential structures of human being” as a means to “‘reground’ [the affirmation of God] on a modernly acceptable ‘foundation’.” Sheehan sees Rahner as assimilating Heidegger’s phenomenology of groundless mystery into the theological: “a formal homology between the Christian God and the *lethe*-dimension of disclosure in Heidegger’s thought.”<sup>1</sup> The homology, in fact, is so strong, that Rahner’s assimilation is effected by one small word, which requalifies the mystery: “We want to call the terms and source of our transcendence ‘the *holy* mystery’.”<sup>2</sup>

In a 1973 article called “Rahner and Heidegger: Being, Hearing, and God”, Masson had shown how the “alleged influence of Heidegger on Rahner is evident, in part, in the notion of ‘hearing’ or ‘attending’

<sup>1</sup> Sheehan, *Karl Rahner*, 309.

<sup>2</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 60 (my italics). See Masson, “Saving God”, esp. 256, for a summary of Sheehan’s arguments.

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(*hören*) which plays a central role in the thought of both. In *Hearers of the Word* Rahner defines man as essentially a potential hearer of a word from God.<sup>3</sup> This attention to the existential mystery is the common denominator of their formal homology (and, I believe, of existential philosophy and mysticism in general).

Sheehan, however, maintains that since Heidegger's investigation provides the philosophical template and Heidegger's project is a-theological, then so must Rahner's.<sup>4</sup> Sheehan's corollary is that "Rahner has turned the discourse about God (theo-logy) back to a discourse about man (kineo-logy)."<sup>5</sup> In "Saving God" (2004), Robert Masson responds to Sheehan, attempting to secure a theological standpoint for Rahner. Sheehan's criticism of the later Heidegger's "unfortunate tendency ... to hypostasize 'being'"<sup>6</sup> provides Masson with a crucial counterargument - for if Sheehan has the conditions to identify Rahner's project as a form of anthropo-logy, then Masson will surely have room to ask, given 'Heidegger's hypostasizing of "being"', whether later Heidegger's investigation was not a form of theo-logy. (It should not be hard to see how this echoes the 'French Debate'.<sup>7</sup>) This bidirectional translatability indicates that whatever constitutes this "formal homology", it underlies phenomenology and theology both.

The Sheehan/Masson debate thus revolves around the conditions under which 'being' may or may not translate as 'God' (or/and vice versa). Since this depends on the content of these words, I take this as tantamount to the question 'What's in a name?' - hinging the discussion on ways (or 'styles') of thinking (and thus describing) 'being'.<sup>8</sup> The shift in the later Heidegger's 'hypostasized' (a stylization of) 'being' needs to be understood in light of what it is formally homologous to: 'God' in Christian mysticism.

And yet, what Rahner recognized in his readings of Heidegger as homologous to theology was obviously not the vocabulary (no 'God') but the *grammar* of Christian mysticism. This means that the formal homology was already present in Heidegger.<sup>9</sup> I therefore propose we invert the terms of the inspiration, and trace not Rahner's importation of Heidegger but Heidegger's style of thinking 'being' within the mystical tradition of contemplative prayer. For, as Simone Weil (philosopher converted to Christian mysticism who will largely represent the tradition in this paper) said, "absolutely unmixed attention is prayer."<sup>10</sup> We will thus need to understand the grammar of contemplative attention - not to save God, but to, by pursuing grammatical similitudes between Heidegger and mysticism, attempt to better understand the role of attention on two overlapping planes: a) in general, in phenomenology and religion and b) in particular, in Heidegger's thinking 'being' (or whichever "name is given the mystery"<sup>11</sup>). Accordingly, we will follow the paths of grammar over those of vocabulary.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Masson, "Rahner and Heidegger", 456.

<sup>4</sup> "Heidegger claims that to extend man's existential movement into its appropriation by the self-withdrawing, self-hiding mystery (*Geheimnis*) will not ground any ontology or theology, but will in fact lead to an "abyss" (*Abgrund*) which, beyond pessimism and optimism, is the inexhaustible origin of meaningful presence. Rahner ... claims that one can and indeed must—even if only implicitly—know this "mystery" as the divine. Heidegger will answer with a measured skepticism." Sheehan, *Karl Rahner*, 116.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The Sheehan/Masson debate parallels Janicaud's accusation of a 'theological drift' in phenomenology (see Janicaud, "The Theological Turn in French Phenomenology") but moves in the opposite direction: whereas Janicaud accused phenomenology of assimilating theology, Sheehan accuses theology (Rahner) of importing phenomenology (Heidegger).

<sup>8</sup> In "Interpreting Rahner's Metaphoric Logic" (2010), Masson claims that Rahner was able to successfully assimilate Heidegger's philosophical system into theology because of the way he synthetically handled "the 'baggage' his faith tradition offers, not as burdensome freight, but as a rich, supple vocabulary and grammar for theological reflection—a vocabulary and grammar capacious enough to appropriate insights from Heidegger and Aquinas, just as Aquinas found ways to appropriate both neo-Platonic and Aristotelian insights." (402) Masson's defense of Rahner's translation is thus posited in terms of stylistic discourse: Rahner's theological restyling of ontological and phenomenological "vocabulary and grammar."

<sup>9</sup> What Rahner read in Heidegger was *already God-talk* – but in phenomenological vocabulary. Caputo, for one, has established Heidegger's Catholic influences quite thoroughly, both in terms of his Eckhartian mysticism (see Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*) and his doctrinal Catholic upbringing (see Caputo, *Heidegger and Theology*).

<sup>10</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 117.

<sup>11</sup> Masson, "Saving God", 271. See footnote 13.

<sup>12</sup> As Wittgenstein said, "The meaning of a question is the method of answering it ... Tell me *how* you are searching, and I will tell you *what* you are searching for." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, 66-67.

Calling Heidegger's later reification of 'being' an "unfortunate tendency", Sheehan clearly sees it as a regression to onto-theology, expressing a certain philosophical stance, following Nietzsche's death of God, whereby existential philosophers of religion will be unwilling to *name* existential mystery or nothingness. In this regard, both existential and mystical thinkers share the same iconoclastic attitude.<sup>13</sup> But the important point is how mystical theology dissolves the 'What's in a name?' question by reframing it in relational terms. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it: "What does 'my God' mean? ... 'My God' signifies: here, now, I am entering into a singular relationship with the lack of a singular name. Hence our justification in asking: who then has the right or the ability to say 'my God?'"<sup>14</sup> For if the name, as mystics insist, is irrelevant in light of the *relation* we access through its use; if, as Nancy says, it "*becomes* a proper name only when it is *addressed* ... It is thus prayer, invocation, supplication, or whatever"<sup>15</sup> that we must investigate. This logic is again paralleled by Wittgenstein's insistence that the meaning of a name is to be found in its use: the *how*, not the *what*.<sup>16</sup> This *how* is attention.

## 1 Attention

Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. Focalization, concentration, of consciousness are of its essence.<sup>17</sup>

William James helped systematize attention in Western psychology at the very start of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Attention is characterized by focalization as well as another structuring element of reality: interest.<sup>18</sup> Attracted to phenomena, we are called upon to understand the world. Attention thus assists in the worldmaking construction of meaning, organizing reality according to hierarchies of interests. For Husserl too, attention is an epistemological force that structures the world.<sup>19</sup>

Husserl also acknowledges how attention can be activated by the *power of the object*. As Luft remarks on Husserl, "Attention is correlated with a 'lure' on the side of the perceptual object, something the experiencing subject could not have created but to which it can respond in an act of attention. Some things grab our attention and pull us out of [a] state of mere perceptions; others do not."<sup>20</sup> Bruce Bégout, in turn, calls this Husserl's *affective attention*.<sup>21</sup> While we find in this picture focalization and affective interest, Husserl is considering here the very opposite of 'active attention' – he is describing the meandering

<sup>13</sup> Masson and Sheehan are, in this respect, on the same side. Masson closes his essay by linking an attention to mystery to an attention to style, saying that Sheehan's failure to see the novelty in Rahner's restyling of Heidegger lies in a "failure to be attentive enough to the openings that sometimes can be cleared when language and thought are stretched to new uses in response to the wonder of humanity and the mystery which claims us—no matter what name is given the mystery." Masson, "Saving God", 271. Thus, by absenting the name of God from the debate, Masson could be doing one of two things: pointing at God negatively (which again frames our discussion of formal homology within Christian mysticism), or disavowing God completely. The former is the only likely option.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy, "Of Divine Places", 117.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> My concept of 'stylization' should be read *latu sensu*, as a how, a way of doing something - be it attending, thinking, or writing philosophy or theology (all family-related activities). It brings particular consideration, however (as we shall see in the final section), to styles of writing-thinking.

<sup>17</sup> James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 256.

<sup>18</sup> "Millions of items of the outward order are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no interest for me. My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind - without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos." Ibid., 402.

<sup>19</sup> "Thus, in Husserl's example of the lust seen in beautiful flowers, and its habitualized attending we notice that their typical traits develop over time into something like botany (cf. Hua XI, 24). In this sense, Husserl states that the interest developed on the basis of skilled attending becomes the 'motor of cognition' in always driving me on in my quest for knowledge. Cognition is basically driven by desire and instinct." Luft, "The Most Beautiful Pearls", 84.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>21</sup> "... affection pertains to all the sensitive stimuli that excite the Self." Bégout, "Phenomenology of Attention", 26.

passivity of ordinary attention that James calls *distraction*.<sup>22</sup> Yet if attention is limited to this passive mode of distracted reactivity (which overrides subjective will and intention), we run the risk of being left without an *attentionally active subject*, forestalling the existential. Under the mode of distraction, the human, as a point of departure in the phenomenological relation, is elided, commandeered by the lure of the object.

## 1.1 Attention and Object: Marion's Aesthetic Grace

The elision of the phenomenological subject is evident in Marion's saturated phenomenon. I will briefly resort to Roquentin, the protagonist in Sartre's *Nausea*, to succinctly showcase how Marion's saturated phenomenon mostly limits attention to the aesthetic force of the object. Throughout the novel, Roquentin's nausea serves to foreground Heidegger's conspicuousness through Roquentin's awkwardness in face of the objective presence of things.<sup>23</sup> The overbearing weight of physical existence makes Roquentin nauseous. The novel, however, closes with an intimation of revelation that suggests a contrasting lightness of 'being'. A sublime song beckons Roquentin to overcome existence by "being", authentically. Is Sartre fusing Heidegger's 'being' with an episode of grace? In this case, we would be witnessing something akin to Rahner's importation, set in a (dramatized) phenomenology of revelation. Yet it does not take too much to recognize the plainly aesthetic, over the religious, experience: no theophanic vocabulary (no mention of 'God') nor symptoms of any change to the self and thus religious grammar at play (no conversion, nor any sense of moral transformation). What happens is that Roquentin feels freed from the weight of daily meaninglessness and is inspired to write a novel - to create a beautiful object like the song he hears. It is the sublimity of art that is translated into existentialist revelation.

Although there is (purposely, of course) nothing religious about Roquentin's revelatory experience, an *aesthetic* framework of grace, as I have discussed elsewhere, is recognizable.<sup>24</sup> What interests me here is how Marion's criteria of saturated phenomena (designed for theophanic phenomenology) may so easily extend to cover aesthetic experiences. Marion himself is clear about this: "In fact, already with the doctrine of the sublime we are dealing with a saturated phenomenon."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the song ticks off all of Marion's four reversals of the Kantian phenomenal rubrics;<sup>26</sup> and the ending of the novel can be read as phenomenological revelation according to Marion's standards.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "The natural tendency of attention when left to itself is to wander to ever new things; and so soon as the interest of its object is over, so soon as nothing new is to be noticed there, it passes, in spite of our will, to something else." James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 422.

<sup>23</sup> "When we discover its unusability, the thing becomes conspicuous. Conspicuousness presents the thing at hand in a certain unhandiness. But this implies that what is unusable just lies there, it shows itself as a thing of use which has this or that appearance and which is always also objectively present with this or that outward appearance in its handiness." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §73.

<sup>24</sup> See Palmeirim, "Attention and Redemption".

<sup>25</sup> Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon", 214.

<sup>26</sup> For Marion's criteria see "The Saturated Phenomenon", especially pp.198-211. Sartre's song: 1) is *unforeseeable*: in a metonymic appropriation of song as the record, Roquentin says "if I were to break it in two, I wouldn't reach it. It is beyond – always beyond": regardless of its division into aggregate parts, it cannot be foreseen as a whole. 2) Its intensity is *unbearable* and bedazzles: "this little jeweled pain which spins around above the record and dazzles me ... I am ashamed for myself and for what exists in front of it;" 3) It is *unconditioned* and shies away from any analogy of experience: "Through layers and layers of existence, it veils itself, thin and firm, and when you want to seize it, you find only existence, you butt yourself against existence devoid of sense. It is behind them; I don't even hear it, I hear sounds." 4) It is *irreducible to the I*, which becomes a me constituted by the phenomenon – Roquentin desires nothing else but to imitate it, assume its constitution, which is being: "And I, too, wanted to *be*. That is all I wanted ... to drive existence out of me ... [to] purify myself ... give back at last the sharp, precise sound of a saxophone note."

<sup>27</sup> The *appearance* of the song is purely of itself and starting from itself ("completely self-absorbed; like a scythe it has cut through the drab intimacy of the world"), and does not subject its possibility to any *determination* ("behind the existence which falls from one present to the other, without a past, without a future, behind these sounds which decompose from day to day, peel off and slip towards death, the melody stays the same, young and firm"). Sartre, *Nausea*, 197; 198.

The problem with Marion's overly inclusive criteria, however, is they provide no subjective content for theophany. That Marion's criteria cannot clearly distinguish theological from aesthetic events is a result, I believe, of his quasi-exclusive concern with the phenomenological *object*, whereas theophanic content would necessarily involve a *faithfully attending subject*.

Must we necessarily accuse of an 'anthropological reduction' a phenomenology that would first take 'the human as such,' ... in our finitude, for the point of departure of its phenomenality? And must we not, on the contrary, hold at once as impossible ... all the bedazzlement of the 'phenomenon of revelation' that would give itself all at once, almost directly and independently of all the (transcendental) conditions of its reception?<sup>28</sup>

Falque's approach (itself stemming from an attack on Marion) is favourable to me not only for his *philosophical* approach to theophany (as Deketelaere puts it, a description *about*, not *from*, faith),<sup>29</sup> but mostly because, by insisting on the "conditions of its reception", he directs us to a logical space for the faculty of attention within an existential phenomenology of religion. For, by designating the human as the point of phenomenological departure (instead of the theophanic) and necessitating a perceiving subject *ab initio*, an existential phenomenology implicitly requires a place for attention: the logical space – a hub – for a phenomenological *relation* between subject and object. But before we can move onto this logic of relatability, and having seen how Marion focuses on the object, let us turn to consider the role of the subject in attention.

## 1.2 Attention and Subject: Stoic Meditational Exercises

As we have seen, William James defined attention as interested focalization through an opposition to reactive distraction. This opposition is the starting point for the spiritual discipline of attention: as Philip Novak states, "ordinary attention comes and goes without one's consent; it is not something one does, but something that happens to an individual."<sup>30</sup> The aim of spiritual attention, therefore, is that we cease to be a passive (our ordinary mode of being-towards-beings) to become an *active* agent of attention, learning how to control and eventually eliminate our "automatic, egocentric, habit-determined patterns of thought."<sup>31</sup>

In *Ideas I*, Husserl anchors this intentional actualization of attention to the subjective end of the phenomenal relation.<sup>32</sup> Husserl distinguishes between three levels of attention, which Bégout helps correlate "to three places in the field of consciousness: the given, the co-given and the horizon of givenness" and in turn to "theme, thematic field and unthematic or marginal field".<sup>33</sup> As we move farther in the levels, we move from an actualized focus towards the more indistinct and fuzzy, until we are finally not aware of phenomena which are, notwithstanding, part of our perceptive field. Bringing phenomena into thematic focal definition requires *intentionality* of attention, which Husserl, resorting to the analogy of attention as light (again),<sup>34</sup> describes as an 'Ego-ray'. This Ego-ray is essentially subjective: it emanates from the self to shed light on the object;<sup>35</sup> and as a *willed act* of choosing whereupon to direct one's attention, defines the Ego's freedom and 'vivacity'.<sup>36</sup> Attention is active, therefore, where there is intended directionality.

<sup>28</sup> Falque, "Larvatus", 188.

<sup>29</sup> See Deketelaere, "Givenness".

<sup>30</sup> Novak, "Attention", 605.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 607.

<sup>32</sup> "It is in their actionality-modes that attentional formations have, in a pre-eminent manner, the characteristic of subjectiveness." Husserl, *Ideas*, 225.

<sup>33</sup> Bégout, "Phenomenology of Attention", 22; 23.

<sup>34</sup> "Attention is usually compared to a spot light. The object of attention, in the specific sense, lies in the cone of more or less bright light; but it can also move into the penumbra and into the completely dark region." Husserl, *Ideas*, 224.

<sup>35</sup> "The ray of attention presents itself as emanating from the pure Ego and terminating in that which is objective, as directed to it or being diverted from it. The ray does not become detached from the Ego; on the contrary, it is itself an Ego-ray, and remains an Ego-ray." Ibid., 225.

<sup>36</sup> "A position-taking which bears the Ego-ray is, because of it, an act of the Ego itself; the Ego does or undergoes, is free or conditioned. The Ego, as we also said, 'lives' in such acts." Ibid.



A concern with the subjective control of attention was prominent in Stoic philosophy, where attention (*prosoche*) was, as Pierre Hadot famously put it, a ‘way of life’: a tool for a therapeutics of the self. Stoic attention was directed not towards God but mostly *self-reflexively* at the self, as a form of moral vigilance that should perceive how distant the self is, in its desires and actions, from the referential norm of *logos*.<sup>37</sup> *Prosoche* was moral logocentrism *par excellence*: a moral handle on the self against the lure of impressions, a rationalized will instated through constant vigilance of the self’s attitudes towards impressions. There is a radicalized detachment of the self from relations with beings.<sup>38</sup> The ideal of *ataraxia* is, from this perspective, best understood as a bulwark within a protective attention of the self. Given its self-reflexive focus, *prosoche* is the potentially solipsistic counterpart to Marion’s elision of the subject.<sup>39</sup> Here attention is ultimately all about the subject.

Logocentric, Stoic attentional methodology was inevitably textual. Hadot explains how Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations* are a series of attentional exercises, aphorisms designed to function like practical handles to guide the soul, called *procheiron*.<sup>40</sup> These meditations were discursive exercises (*meditatio*: ‘an exercise’, ‘a practice in something’) designed to rewire the self: they were used like short prayers; or mnemonic triggers to remind ourselves of philosophical themes, such as our limited existential condition.<sup>41</sup> It is crucial to acknowledge that even though *procheiron* run the risk of logocentrically locking the self in moral solipsism, they inherently provide a methodology designed to counteract passive, distracted attention.

The Stoic ascetic combating of phenomenological lure would later, incorporated into Christian mysticism, be used as the training that goes into developing the required *sustained* thematic attention used in contemplative prayer.<sup>42</sup> It is because sustained attention is so effortful that meditation as ascetic training is required for the apophatic practice of contemplation.<sup>43</sup> I shall argue that understanding this sequential link is crucial to understanding Heidegger’s move from BT [*Being and Time*] to his later ‘reification’.<sup>44</sup>

37 “... the first and most important duty of the philosopher is to test impressions, choosing between them and only deploying those that have passed the test.” Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1,20,7.

38 “It’s not easy to combine and reconcile the two - the carefulness of a person devoted to externals and the dignity of one who’s detached - but it’s not impossible. It’s like something of an ocean voyage. What can I do? Pick the captain, the boat, the date, and the best time to sail. But then a storm hits. Well, it’s no longer my business; I have done everything I could.” Ibid., 2,5,1.

39 Just as an existential phenomenology must not be subsumed to the object (Marion), nor must it be bracketed off in the phenomenological subject. As Nancy maintains, meaning is formed within a circularity of worldmaking, not within an *epoché*. As Deketelaere summarizes, “what the phenomenological reduction aims at—constructing all meaning as immanently constituted by a consciousness—is impossible because consciousness is always already carried along outside of itself by the movement of sense in which it is caught up.” Deketelaere, “Givenness”, 8.

40 “Attention (*prosoche*) is the fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude. It is a continuous vigilance and presence of mind, self consciousness which never sleeps, and a constant tension of the spirit. Thanks to this attitude, the philosopher is fully aware of what he does at each instant, and he wills his actions fully. Thanks to his spiritual vigilance, the Stoic always has ‘at hand’ (*procheiron*) the fundamental rule of life: that is, the distinction between what depends on us and what does not.” Hadot, *Philosophy*, 84.

41 In the following example, Marcus Aurelius resorts to phenomena to create a resolute acceptance of being-towards-death by calling attention to the objective reality of dead beings: “How good it is, when you have roast meat or suchlike foods before you, to impress on your mind that this is the dead body of a fish, this is the dead body of a bird or pig ... How good these perceptions are at getting to the heart of the real thing and penetrating through it, so you can see it for what it is! This should be your practice throughout all your life.” Aurelius, *Meditations*, 6,13. (Also, see Hadot, *Philosophy*, 13; 185).

42 Sustaining spiritual attention requires an extenuating apprenticeship: “when the Christian is asked to concentrate his attention solely upon God ... when the Tibetan Buddhist attempts with massive attention to construct elaborate images of Tara on the screen of consciousness, the first lesson these practitioners learn is that they cannot do it. Ordinary mentation is freshly understood to be foreign to the deepest reality of one’s being.” Novak, “Attention”, 608.

43 In “Apophysis and Askêsis”, Jonathan Ellsworth notes how there is a link that often goes unnoticed “between *apophysis* and *askêsis*: one rarely finds mystical theologies where the former is employed without the latter.” Ellsworth, “Apophysis”, 212.

44 Ellsworth also remarks how contemporary philosophy has maintained a steady interest in *apophysis*, as evidenced in its “appropriations of apophatic theological language.” Ibid. These appropriations were obviously central in Janicaud’s accusation, and also appertain to the later Heidegger.

## 2 Attention in Use: Meditation and Contemplation

Attention is a key element in Simone Weil's conception of prayer as a waiting for the grace of God.

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts, as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all, our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.<sup>45</sup>

Weil describes two parallel yet interdependent activities: the suspension of thought, which should remain concentrated on the 'object' (God) she awaits the forthcoming of, and an underlying web of knowledge.<sup>46</sup> Her picture of the mountaintop illustrates two underlying disciplines of mystical attention: meditation and contemplation. Let us examine these further.

Although attention has a common root in the ancient Eastern philosophies of India, namely Buddhism and Hinduism, the term covers a varied array of practices.<sup>47</sup> We will focus on only two broad families originating in the Buddhist "one-pointed" attention (*samatha*). Within this focalized use of attention, meditation, on the one hand, typically utilizes physical and symbolic objects, words and texts to facilitate the focalization of attention.<sup>48</sup> There is thus a close parallel between meditation and cataphatic prayer, which is based on discursivity and analysis.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, contemplation, which relates to apophatic prayer, "goes beyond thinking, which is separative, or reductionistic, to awareness, which is unitive."<sup>50</sup> Attention, as pertaining to prayer, is formally linked to these two styles of thinking. In short, meditation is related to language and rational discourse whereas contemplation is related to silence, synthesis and the attitudinal dimension.<sup>51</sup>

Although distinct, meditation and contemplation are, in the mystical doctrine of Christian grace, *sequentially* organized. In the *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John of the Cross describes the journey of the soul toward its mystical union with God. This journey is "a 'dark night' . . . [a] purgative contemplation, which causes passively in the soul the negation of itself."<sup>52</sup> This therapeutic divestment of the self is an ascetic account of contemplation, which St. John calls the *Passive Night*, and which follows the meditation of the *Active Night*. Once the devotee has reached Weil's mountaintop (John's Passive Night), thinking must stop, for "in this state of contemplation ... it is God Who is now working in the soul."<sup>53</sup>

St. John also links the shift "from meditation to contemplation"<sup>54</sup> to a movement from the cataphatic (the physical objectivity of images<sup>55</sup> and words<sup>56</sup>) to the apophatically silent world of spiritual phenomena. But this silencing is not to be confused with the calm vacuity of mindfulness or Quietism. The underlying world of knowledge in Weil's mountain analogy has been formed within a theological form of life: icons,

<sup>45</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> To say that to contemplate is already to participate in a world of meanings is implicitly to make an argument against solipsism and for relatability (in the sense of Nancy above: ft. 39).

<sup>47</sup> See Palmeirim, "Attention".

<sup>48</sup> E.g. mantras, icons or elaborate liturgical commands such as *The Spiritual Exercises* of Loyola.

<sup>49</sup> "... meditation, which in the West is based on discursive reasoning ..." Goodwin, *Give Us This Day*, 118.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "Affective life is, in religion, a deeper layer of feeling ... in negative prayer it has to do with primary states of feeling that are not caused by perception or wanting, but are deeper, such as love." Ibid., 119.

<sup>52</sup> John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, Exposition, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1,9,7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1,10,1.

<sup>55</sup> "... they burden themselves with images and rosaries ... like children with trinkets" Ibid., 1,3,1.

<sup>56</sup> "Many can never have enough of listening to counsels . . . possessing and reading many books which treat of this matter, and they spend their time on all these things rather than on works of mortification and perfecting of the inward poverty of spirit." Ibid.

images, sacraments, homilies, rites, communions; a life not opposed to the philosophical.<sup>57</sup> The purpose of meditation (discursive thinking) - viewed within this broader sequence, with contemplation – is to institute a ‘vocabulary’ that may harness an attitudinal ‘grammar’. It is within this theological vocabulary (which grows within a communal way of life) that prayerful love, as a specific form of relational attitude, has meaning.

In this sense, texts and other linguistic forms *in-form* the apophatic *Passive Night*, which only then is prepared to ‘hear’ not words but the non-discursive (but already trained and educated) ‘language of the heart’, which is essentially love.<sup>58</sup> As Weil neatly puts it, “it is impossible to do harm to others when we act in a state of prayer.”<sup>59</sup> Contemplative prayer is thus mostly an education of desire: a movement from desire as *will* (key element in both the Stoic subjective control of attention and Husserl’s intentionality) to desire as an *acceptance* of the radical absence of God.<sup>60</sup> Thus the move from St. John’s designations of *Active* to *Passive Night*. However, this is *not* a reversion to our initial mode of distraction or (Marion’s objectified) lure, but a (second, further) thematically-focused passivity, where will has become merely instrumental in *sustaining* the focus. Sustained attention is the phenomenological equivalent to Simone Weil’s waiting, which means the ability to endure contemplative attention, directed at the ultimate absence of God, in loving affliction.<sup>61</sup>

In turn, thematic focus explains why a *name* is grammatically necessary. For what might guide such taxing efforts but a *telos*? The grammar of prayer/ attention/ thinking logically necessitates an object: the name of ‘God’ should not then be thought of as a definition of *something*, but as the provision of an ‘object’ (or ‘place’, *vide* Nancy) whereupon to *direct* our thinking (reasoning) or attention (relatedness). The point being that meditation as a prior training for contemplation is required, not in order to tell us ‘where’ or ‘to whom’ look – but *how*.<sup>62</sup>

## 2.1 Attention as an Existential Hub

The relational aspect of prayer understood as attention is key in Nancy’s existential characterization of faith as a *being-onto* God. “What there is revelation of is not ‘God,’ as if He were something that can be exhibited (that is why to the question ‘what is God?’ there is and there is not an answer), it is rather the onto-God (*l’être-Dieu*) or being-onto-god.”<sup>63</sup> As we have seen, attention should be understood as the existential hub phenomenologically mediating subject and object: what becomes prominent (or of value), then, is

<sup>57</sup> As Weil maintains, although in *apophysis* we must stop thought, there is no true prayer without a prior meditational sense of analytical, sceptical thinking: “Religion in so far as it is a source of consolation is a hindrance to true faith: in this sense atheism is a purification. I have to be atheistic with the part of myself which is not made for God. Among those men in whom the supernatural part has not been awakened, the atheists are right and the believers wrong.” Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 115.

<sup>58</sup> The Bishop of Bossuet says quite simply that in contemplation “one learns to speak so much to God that one retains only the language that he alone understands.” This language consists “above all in the act of love, which neither can nor wishes to explain itself to God except through itself. One tells him of one’s love only by loving him, and at that time the heart speaks to God alone.” Caussade, *On Prayer*, 45-6.

<sup>59</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 126.

<sup>60</sup> “Attention is bound up with desire. Not [with] the will but with desire – or more exactly, consent . . . Attention alone – that attention which is so full that the ‘I’ disappears – is required of me. I have to deprive all that I call ‘I’ of the light of my attention and turn it on that which cannot be conceived.” Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 118.

<sup>61</sup> “Affliction makes God appear to be absent for a time, more absent than a dead man, more absent than light in the utter darkness of a cell. A kind of horror submerges the whole soul. What is terrible is that if, in this darkness where there is nothing to love, the soul ceases to love, God’s absence becomes final. The soul has to go on loving in the emptiness, or at least to go on wanting to love, though it may only be with an infinitesimal part of itself. Then, one day, God will come to show himself to this soul and to reveal the beauty of the world to it, as in the case of Job. But if the soul stops loving it falls, even in this life, into something almost equivalent to hell.” Weil, *Waiting*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> Echoing Falque (see citation to ft.28), Ellsworth notes how the goal of asceticism is to “cultivate certain capacities of receptivity.” Ellsworth, “Apophysis”, 219.

<sup>63</sup> Nancy, “Of Divine Places”, 124.



not ‘what’ one or the other ‘is’, but the meaningfulness of the relation of the two terms. This relational dimension is key in Heidegger’s philosophy.

In BT, circumspection and care are two central existential categories that structure Dasein precisely by activating modes of attention within a space of relational meaningfulness. Here we find a place for authentic intimacy within existential immanence and finitude.<sup>64</sup> For Heidegger, the world is always already related in care. Beings come near (and we closer to being-in-the-world) as they become ready-to-hand, i.e., as we heed them in care. Circumspection is also a mode of attention to things, which indicates that useful things, when used and not simply ‘stared at’, reveal themselves as participating in a world.<sup>65</sup>

Attitudes and moods take precedence to rationalized concepts in BT. Ideas do not participate in beings through Platonic referentiality, in the inevitable distance between words and beings: we participate (*methexis*) with *innerworldly* beings that already show forth their meaning within a totality of relevance. And so Heidegger, in the way of the ancient Greeks, calls beings ‘that which comes forth’ (*aletheia*) instead of ‘objects’ (which as a term feeds on the *a priori* idea that we are separated from the world). Heidegger, in short, turns *methexis* on its head: what separates us from the world, after all, are ideas and the presupposition that we are to participate via discursive referentiality. Heidegger thus undermines analytic rationalism, accusing philosophy of distorting the being of beings by veiling it with a certain style of thinking.<sup>66</sup> It should by now be clear to see how this line of thinking bears close affinities with contemplation, as I have been outlining it.

We also need to understand that contemplation itself is an *askesis* in the sense of a willed negative effort: on top of negating desire-as-will, in contemplation we must also move beyond the cataphatic, negating analytic thinking and the discourses that cover up attitudinal relatedness.<sup>67</sup> This is what contemplation effects, in contrast to meditation. And in this light, Heidegger’s distancing from a logocentric ontology is illuminated by contemplation as a form of attention to ‘being’ that, like Weil’s, includes thinking.

The later Heidegger directly inscribed himself in the contemplative tradition: “The effort to make an adequate translation of the final words of the saying, the attempt to hear what is expressed in the Greek words *eon emmenai*, is nothing less than the attempt to *take to heart* That which calls on us to think.”<sup>68</sup>; “the difficulty of going over from the *saying word* of the still covetous vision of things, from the work of the eyes, to the ‘*work of the heart*’.”<sup>69</sup> In what follows, I will try to show how the forms of attention we have been discussing bear on Heidegger’s ‘turn’ as a style of thinking ‘being’.

## 3 Stylizations of Being

### 3.1 Stylizations of Thinking

Nick Trakakis has comprehensively contextualized the question of style, which in “the philosophy of religion, a field that has recently experienced a renewal in both the analytic and Continental traditions ... often accords the question of style special prominence, for it is widely held that in this sphere at least

<sup>64</sup> “Care is being-toward-death.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §329.

<sup>65</sup> “Our absorption in taking care of things in the work-world nearest to us has the function of discovering . . . and with a varying attentive penetration.” Ibid., §71.

<sup>66</sup> “Gaining phenomenological access to the beings thus encountered consists rather in rejecting the interpretational tendencies crowding and accompanying us which cover over the phenomenon of ‘taking care’ of things in general.” Ibid., §67.

<sup>67</sup> As Ellsworth states, “apophasis is itself an *askēsis*. When apophasis is employed, it is not just a principle, not just the always available platitude that we cannot predicate x if x is incomprehensible. It is a *meditatio*, that is, an *exercise* itself. The apophatic exercise is undertaken to remove conceptual obstacles that would preclude the seeker from mystical experience.” (Ellsworth, “Apophasis”, 222.) In other words, contemplation is a phenomenological reduction – but of analytical rationalism.

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 231, my italics.

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?”, 138-9, my italics.

the ‘what’ (what is true) is closely connected to the ‘how’ (the manner in which we discover and express that which is true).<sup>70</sup> The distinctions between meditation and contemplation are paralleled in a recent stylistic division within philosophy: “The heart of the analytic/Continental opposition is most evident in methodology, that is, in a focus on analysis or on synthesis.”<sup>71</sup>

This is especially evident in the later Heidegger, widely acknowledged as an, if not *the*, exemplary figure of the Continental style. When Richard Rorty criticizes (like Sheehan above) what he sees as Heidegger’s reversal to a metaphysical *ousiology*, Rorty is also irritated on account of a matter of styles of thinking, of what he calls a “reification of language”: the seeping of metaphor and mystical language into philosophical discourse. In BT, the earlier Heidegger’s therapeutic *destruktion* was, Rorty argues, similar to the later Wittgenstein’s writing in *Philosophical Investigations* (where everything is already alright with the world: the problem is philosophy and its theoretical pictures). Both sought a “detranscendentalized, naturalized conception of philosophy as a form of therapy, as a *techne* rather than as the achievement of *theoria*.”<sup>72</sup> The analytic style is often equated with a pursuit of clarity through the use of the ordinary, ‘folk’ language that the later Wittgenstein developed and inspired as a style. But as the earlier Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and Heidegger’s BT both exemplify, “often obstructing the goal of clarity is the analytic philosopher’s penchant for *formalization*.”<sup>73</sup> Both of these works are highly formalized and technical: their common denominator is not exactly clarity but *explanation*. But Heidegger then took a ‘turn’. What changed in terms of his thinking that we may associate with contemplative attention?

Philosophical works in the Continental style “are more literary than scientific in style and temperament.”<sup>74</sup> The consequences are significant. For one, this style distances itself from explanation to focus on *expression*, which is traditionally viewed as including attitudinal content, but also stands to mean that the supposed difference between ‘form and content’ collapse. Whereas in the analytic style ‘form’ (often taken as the very idea of ‘style’) is seen as an *added* element that distracts from *factual* thinking, in the continental style form is regarded as organic to content, meaning that “if the mode of presentation is altered, so is the content.”<sup>75</sup> It is because thinking and discourse are inseparable (at least in public presentation) that “Heidegger justifies his violence to German by arguing that language shapes thought; if ontology is to be rethought from the ground up, the old terms will need to be overhauled if not completely discarded.”<sup>76</sup> This element was already present in BT’s manifold technical neologisms: the metaphoric (i.e., language operated to produce novel thinking) working at a *vocabulary* level. But what characterizes Heidegger’s later works – leading irritated critics to classify his works as obscurantist, is also a premeditated stylistic emphasis on *aporia*.

<sup>70</sup> Prado, *A House Divided*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Prado proceeds, “Analytic philosophers typically try to solve fairly delineated philosophical problems by reducing them to their parts and to the relations in which these parts stand. Continental philosophers typically address large questions in a synthetic or integrative way, and consider particular issues to be ‘parts of the larger unities’ and as properly understood and dealt with only when fitted into those unities.” (Ibid.) Père Lahr’s systematization of mono- vs. pluri-ideism as the two general characteristics of attention makes the parallel between meditation/analysis and contemplation/synthesis very clear: “The exclusive fixation of attention on a single object constitutes what we call *monoideism* [monoïdéisme]. From this property another apparently opposed property naturally ensues: *polyideism*. The interest it grants its exclusive object makes attention evoke associations of ideas, images and feelings that are somehow related to this object. Hence, this is not a disperse polyideism, which would be the very negation of attention, but one convergent and ordered according to the requirements of the dominant impression.” Lahr, *Cours*, 68 (my translation).

<sup>72</sup> Rorty, “The reification of language”, 339. That *techne* is related to (means, exercising, practice, and thus) meditation, whereas *theoria* has a direct etymological link to contemplation, should not be neglected here.

<sup>73</sup> Trakakis, “Style”, 926.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 927.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 925.

<sup>76</sup> McGrath, *Heidegger*, 3.

### 3.2 Heidegger's Aporetic Stylization of Being

Briefly returning to the topic of Rahner's importation - Masson, in his 1973 article, explained how a younger Rahner had misread Heidegger's 'hearing' as that of traditional metaphysics: hearing *a* being.<sup>77</sup> Rahner had missed the point due to a crucial grammatical confusion: whereas he was expecting the logical form of a statement, Heidegger was using the logical form of a *question*: "The true problem is what we do not know and what, insofar as we know it *authentically*, namely *as* a problem, we know only *questioningly*. To know how to question means to know how to wait, even a whole lifetime."<sup>78</sup> As Masson explains, directly linking *aporia* to attention, "it is in reference to this question that the sense of 'hearing' or 'attending' is developed."<sup>79</sup>

The grammatical form of the question as an existential investigation, however, was already constitutive of the mystical tradition of contemplation. In a chapter illustratively called "Logic of Mysticism", Herbert McCabe redescribes Thomistic analogy as based on *aporia*: we "can use language to say what God is so long as we always realize that we do not know what our words mean ... As Weil has said of the supernatural good, 'we can say that God is love, so long as we recognize that this love is incomprehensible.'"<sup>80</sup> And yet "we mean these statements quite literally."<sup>81</sup> 'To mean literally' then, is simply to assert belief. Thus, *statements* about God are always already incomprehensible, i.e., limited to the realm of *questioning*.<sup>82</sup> Weil's mystical thinking is also, of course, avowedly *aporetic*.<sup>83</sup> Yet, although Heidegger uses the grammar of contemplation, he never, of course, adopts the vocabulary of the Christian tradition. He does not state faith but meaningfulness. While both traverse contradiction, Weil's contemplation secures a destination: the final *grounded certainty* of the *name* that the word 'God' secures, whilst that of Heidegger's remains groundless, shifting between rethought versions of 'being'. His contemplation of 'being' remains in our world.

The later Heidegger pursued not one, but several reified versions of Being. For Nancy, this is all a confusion. "All of these proofs and counterproofs put together have perhaps never demonstrated anything other than the fact that being is *and* is not."<sup>84</sup> I agree to an extent; however, I am trying to argue how this ambiguously intermingling conflation of grammatical elements that are shared by both 'God' and 'being' on Heidegger's part served not to *prove* something, but to *express* the very being-onto existence that is at the epicenter of existential thinking. This is partly why the question of style is important. For although one might be inclined to call Heidegger's turn one of *being-onto-Being*, his purposeful stylizations of 'being' by, for example, resorting to altered spellings ('Seyn') and crossing-outs ('being') directly express the (mystically) blasphemous insufficiency of the word. In his textual strategies, which are nothing but a demonstration of his very thought, he is in line with Nancy.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>77</sup> But "Heidegger does not say *Being* is a transcendent (noun) ... [he] is not seeking to determine the source of being, but the meaning of *Being* itself." This meaning remains hidden, and is "a manifesting, not a manifested." Therefore, Heidegger's *destruktive* metaphysical investigation starts from a different question - and having "not even recognized the question", "Rahner's evaluation [of *Being and Time*] ... completely misses the point." Masson, "Hearing", 479.

<sup>78</sup> Notice also how Heidegger evokes Weil's *waiting*. Masson, "Hearing", 484, quoting Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 1961), 172.

<sup>79</sup> Masson, "Hearing", 487.

<sup>80</sup> McCabe, "Logic of Mysticism", 56; 57.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>82</sup> "... we use the word 'God' as a label for something we do not know, for the answer to a question we can ask but cannot answer." *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>83</sup> Weil defends the synthesis of contradiction as the path to transcendental truth content: "all truth contains a contradiction. Contradiction is the point of the pyramid." (Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 98.) It is also a method: "What the relation of opposites can do in the approach to the natural being, the unifying grasp of contradictory ideas can do in the approach to God." (*Ibid.*, 100.)

<sup>84</sup> Nancy, "Of Divine Places", 133.

<sup>85</sup> "We blaspheme ... the name of God by making it the name of *something*." *Ibid.*

In Heidegger's later thinking, questioning is pursued stylistically: forced on readers as the authentic mode of thinking. As McGrath explains, "the ambiguity generated by Heidegger is not, then, the chaos generated by unclear thinking, but a deliberate and skillfully executed obfuscation – like a Zen *koan* – designed to break our heads and free us of the hardened categories that obstruct genuine understanding."<sup>86</sup> The style is formally and logically expressive because it has become a speech-act of the kind of thinking Heidegger was calling for in BT: the substitution of rationalism by a fundamental ontology.

In sum, in the sequential framework I have been sketching, BT was Heidegger's 'meditation' (the explicative establishing of a structural framework). His later apophatic style is *a series of attempts* that can only be described as intentionally *paradoxical* attempts to enact two different language acts (or 'communicative directions') at once: to *speak* the 'language of the heart': to *speak a hearing*: "The being of beings directs that which constitutes the fundamental character of thinking – the *legein* and *noien* – into its own nature. What so directs calls on us to think."<sup>87</sup> So Heidegger engages in various repeated attempts, all tautological motions within this contradiction of a 'speaking-hearing': discursive meditations that simultaneously desire to 'be' (or, as writing, to signal, to express) a 'silent' language-of-the-heart. As such, these meditations can only shift as '*differencial*' mythemes over a groundless being-unto. We can think of them, I believe, as existential reactions to Wittgenstein's thought that "The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing."<sup>88</sup>

Indeed, the later Heidegger's various meditations bear forth constantly new 'revelations', *expressing* groundlessness itself.<sup>89</sup> Because Heidegger constantly resumed his contemplative thinking anew, he could not escape this tautological circle. Each time he came back to 'the clearing' (or 'the draft', etc.), the first principle he named as the 'source of thinking' was different. In 1946 Heidegger thematized thinking as a poetic response to a riddle.<sup>90</sup> Following a lecture to the Bremen Club in 1951, he writes a genealogy: "Once . . . in the beginning of Western thinking, the essence of language flashed in the light of Being – once, when Heraclitus thought the *logos* as his guiding word, so as to think in this word the Being of beings."<sup>91</sup> Thinking here gained a source and name – not 'God' but, in a reversal of Stoicism, "*logos* is the name for the Being of beings."<sup>92</sup> But as a *writing*, as a saying that is groundless and without the concluding dogma of a name, Heidegger's mythemes continued to incessantly unfold in spatial and temporal metaphors of *aletheia*: the 'clearing', the 'draft', the 'Fourfold', 'building dwellings', the 'Moment'...

## Conclusion

Heidegger's groundless versions of 'being' are not mere discursive quirks, but a lexical incorporation of subjective attitudinal *reactions to our existential situation*. In *Without Proof or Evidence*, O.K. Bouwsma contrasts two forms of religious reactions to the mystery of God: the original psalms and St. Anselm's citational use of them in his ontological proof. In comparison to the psalmists, as Bouwsma tells us, Anselm has dissolved any hint of praise: there is only fact.<sup>93</sup> The psalms have been analytically restyled as proof,

<sup>86</sup> McGrath, *Heidegger*, 62.

<sup>87</sup> Heidegger, "What is Called Thinking", 231.

<sup>88</sup> Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 166.

<sup>89</sup> "The movements of the *Ereignis*, the sequence of epochal configurations, the rhythm of the *Geschicke* are all groundless. We remember the Heideggerian formulas of a kind of deep redundancy, or tautologousness." Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, xviii.

<sup>90</sup> "But what if Being in its essence *needs to use* the essence of man? If the essence of man consists in thinking the truth of Being? Then thinking must poetize on the riddle of Being. It brings the dawn of thought into the neighborhood of what is for thinking." Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment", 58.

<sup>91</sup> Heidegger, "Logos", 78.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>93</sup> "And what in this instance has Anselm done? Clearly, he has lifted out the shouting surroundings. . . And where is the wonder now, the delight, and the thanksgiving? Gone with the shout . . . And now imagine Anselm. He writes down the sentence . . . looks at it hard or he repeats it to himself and sees in it nothing like the climax of acclaim, but a discovery. So that is what God is . . . Praise on ice – some praise, that is – looks like ever so many matters of fact." Bouwsma, *Without Proof or Evidence*, 49.

and there is no longer any prayer there, only reasoning; no passionate reverence to God, only argumentation. When Bouwsma puts back what Anselm had excised... “These writers were, of course, praising God. And what praise it is! ... What jubilation and ecstasy! ... we sing, we praise, we are glad, we bless, we magnify, we exult, we extol, we make a noise, we raise our hands, we dance, we sound the trumpet, we play on the psaltery and harp, we dance ...”<sup>94</sup>

Anselm’s elision of expression (i.e., of *being-onto* itself) brings our discussion back to the issue of style. Analytic philosophers’ irritation with metaphor, as we have seen, is on the one hand an attempt to uphold a certain descriptive stance - but a stylistic defence of scientific objectivity can conversely serve to mask authorial presence: along with intention. In his proof, Anselm has disappeared along with the singing: “the distinctive voice of the author is displaced by an impartial, probing and ‘rational’ voice (an ‘ideal observer’) that is devoid of bodily effect and cultural context.”<sup>95</sup> Analytic thinking, given its goal of objectivity, *hides* ‘style’ – but this is itself, of course, also a stylization.<sup>96</sup> This elision of the subjective is, notwithstanding, always a style, for *someone* writes. The later Heidegger’s style, in contrast to Anselm’s, visibly displays his own signature: Heidegger, too, has a place for singing as a form of thinking.<sup>97</sup>

Contemplation, in this light, is not the elimination of the subjective, but a methodological disclosure of the attitudinal (non-discursive) dimension that is (or is not) invested in a given being-onto. In this sense, ‘language of the heart’ can (or should) very well be recognized as a measure of the signification of ‘belief’. Referring back to our initial debate, we should now be in a position to acknowledge not only that the spiritual practice of attention overlaps theology and existential phenomenology, having made it grammatically possible for Rahner to theologically import Heidegger; but also that if we describe the difference between ‘being’ and ‘God’ as a matter of ‘faith’, then attention (as the formal homology between ‘being’ and ‘God’, but also as homologous, in its ‘being-onto’, to ‘faith’) should stand to surmount the difference between these two words, to the extent that they are words. That is, given that neither ‘God’ nor ‘being’ are things to *prove*, ‘singing’ is closer in signification to being-onto-these words/names/placeholders.

When we compare Anselm and Heidegger under Bouwsma’s distinction, and see Heidegger’s ‘reification’ as a *dedication*, a commitment and entanglement of his thinking with ‘being’, then the distinctions between words such as ‘faith’, ‘belief’ or ‘certainty’ become blurred (which is precisely what sets up the formal homology in the first place). Was Anselm more ‘faithful’ in his ‘belief’ in ‘God’? Need we reserve such words to (conventional) lexical definitions as opposed to their (phenomenological and subjective) grammatical usages? There is always semantic tension between the two, but if we grant the latter stance predominance then, just as the mystic ‘God’ needs no name, we might all stand to gain if we dissolved or at least softened the boundaries a little between ‘faith’, ‘belief’ and ‘certainty’ - and looked at how these words are put to use. Which can only mean listening to how others (as compared to others and me) ‘think’ or otherwise express their being-onto existence. In this sense, Heidegger might well have been more religious in his style of ‘thinking-being’ than most believers, at the risk of sounding less philosophical in style.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>95</sup> Trakakis, “Style”, 927.

<sup>96</sup> “The fear in these circles is that any significant regard for style tends to lead to a departure from the standards of objectivity and rationality.” Ibid., 923.

<sup>97</sup> “To sing . . . means: to belong to the precinct of beings themselves. This precinct, as the very nature of language, is Being itself. To sing the song means to be present in what is present itself. It means *Dasein*, existence.” Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?”, 138.

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